United Nations A/53/PV.84

General Assembly

Official Records

Fifty-third Session

84th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 9 December 1998, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Opertti ..... (Uruguay)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Wehbe (Syrian Arab Republic), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 17 (*continued*)

Appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other appointments

(g) Appointment of members of the Committee on Conferences

Note by the Secretary-General (A/53/108)

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): As indicated in the note by the Secretary-General on this item, document A/53/108, since the terms of office of Austria, Jamaica, Jordan, Kenya, Morocco, Nepal and the United States of America will expire on 31 December 1998, it is necessary for the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session to appoint seven members to fill the resulting vacancies. The members so appointed will serve for a period of three years, beginning on 1 January 1999.

After consultations with the Chairmen of the groups of African States, Asian States, Latin America and Caribbean States and Western European and other States, the President has appointed Algeria, Austria, Jamaica, Jordan, Kenya, Nepal and the United States of America as members of the Committee on Conferences with effect from 1 January 1999.

May I take it that the Assembly takes note of these appointments?

It was so decided.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of sub-item (g) of agenda item 17?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 20 *(continued)* **and agenda item 45**

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

(c) Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan

The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/53/346, A/53/455, A/53/695)

Draft resolution (A/53/L.66)

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I now call on the representative of Germany to introduce draft resolution A/53/L.66.

98-86650 (E)

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Mr. Kastrup (Germany): I am pleased to introduce a draft resolution on Afghanistan under agenda items 45 and 20 (c). I would like to thank all those delegations that have participated in the joint effort leading to the presentation of today's text. Extensive consultations with the sponsors, as well as with other delegations, have been conducted prior to the presentations of the draft resolution in an effort to secure consensus on it. I trust that, in keeping with tradition, the draft resolution will be adopted without a vote.

The draft resolution is sponsored by 57 Member States to date, and we attach particular importance to the fact that the co-sponsorship bridges all regional groups and involves Member States from all regions of the globe. I should like to express my special thanks to all of them, and I invite other United Nations Member States that have not yet done so to join the group of sponsors.

The following countries, which do not appear in the draft resolution, are also sponsors of the draft resolution: Belarus, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Iceland, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Morocco, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea and Tajikistan.

It is our deepest conviction that a durable settlement of the Afghan conflict can be achieved only through a ceasefire and the start of a political dialogue. Germany thus supports all United Nations efforts and initiatives as well as the activities of groups of interested States or international organizations to facilitate such a political dialogue to promote peace in Afghanistan. We are grateful to the Secretary-General, to the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan and especially to the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi, who, in a situation that could be described as "mission impossible", never lost their courage or their commitment to continue their efforts to move the peace process forward in Afghanistan.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all United Nations staff members who have been, or still are, working in Afghanistan for their excellent work under extreme and often discouraging conditions. I would also like to recall the death of United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA) Military Adviser Lieutenant Colonel Calo, as well as the deaths of Mr. Mohammad Habibi of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Mr. Mohammad Bashayar of World Food Programme (WFP), who lost their lives while performing their duties in Afghanistan. I would like to extend our deepest sympathy to their families.

The draft resolution I am introducing today covers both political and humanitarian questions. Let me focus on some of the most important issues in this draft resolution.

The situation in Afghanistan has, unfortunately, further deteriorated in the last 12 months. The conflict has escalated and the fighting intensified. Despite repeated international appeals not to launch military offensives against each other, both Afghan factions continue fighting and still seem to believe, against all evidence to the contrary, in the possibility of a military solution. Direct consequences of this fighting are the continuing massive loss of human life, killing, refugee flows, harassment, the forcible displacement of innocent civilians and extensive economic destruction.

We are deeply concerned by the increasingly ethnic nature of the conflict and by reports of persecution on the grounds of ethnic origin and religious persuasion. Credible reports reveal that mass killings and atrocities committed by combatants against civilians and prisoners of war are going on and have even worsened. Despite the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, foreign military support to the Afghan parties continued unabated through 1998. This military support included not only the supplying of arms, ammunition and military equipment, but also the presence and involvement of foreign military, paramilitary or secret-service personnel on the ground.

In view of this situation, the draft resolution expresses the conviction that there is no military solution to the Afghan conflict. It calls upon all Afghan parties to cease immediately all armed hostilities, to renounce the use of force and to engage, without delay or preconditions, in a political dialogue under United Nations auspices aimed at achieving a lasting political settlement of the conflict by creating a broad-based, multi-ethnic and fully representative government acceptable to the Afghan people.

The draft resolution also condemns the continued foreign military support to the Afghan parties and calls upon all States concerned to strictly refrain from any outside interference and to end immediately all forms of military support. In accordance with previous resolutions on Afghanistan, the draft Germany is introducing today reiterates that the main responsibility for finding a peaceful solution to the conflict lies with the Afghan

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

parties. Peace would best be served if the Afghan parties and the States with influence over them all responded to international appeals for a renewed and sincere effort aiming at a lasting political settlement of the conflict, based on the principles contained in the text before us.

The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate. We are distressed about this downward trend, characterized by the widespread loss of human life and a worsening pattern of grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. Women and children have suffered most. Access to victims has often been denied by warring factions through blockades and other interference; thus humanitarian aid is being used as a weapon against the civilian population.

Among the sectors targeted for international assistance, the situation of women is particularly grim. The enforcement of edicts restricting women's employment and girls' education severely limits opportunities for women, prevents the full deployment of national female staff and is also resulting in the loss of livelihoods, especially among women and female-headed households.

We also deeply deplore the increasing hostility, particularly among the Taliban, towards the community of international aid workers in Afghanistan. This was manifest in armed attacks against United Nations personnel and in the expulsion of all international non-governmental organizations active in Kabul. Again, innocent civilians have to suffer the consequences. Let me be clear in saying that safety and security is a non-negotiable issue and a prerequisite for the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Furthermore, we note with deep concern the continued laying of mines in a country where 10 million landmines are causing at least 10 people to die or be injured every day. This is a concern of highest priority for my country. For that reason, Germany has provided 13.3 million deutsche marks for mine-clearance activities since 1994, in addition to its humanitarian assistance of more than DM 60 million since 1993. We will continue our support in 1999. The contamination of large areas with landmines and unexploded ordnance remains a major deterrent to the repatriation of refugees, the return of internally displaced persons and the rebuilding of livelihoods. It also remains a major hindrance to rehabilitation and development in Afghanistan.

The conflict in Afghanistan not only has international implications for the neighbouring countries, as we saw in the increasing tensions between Iran and the Taliban in October; its effects are also reaching far beyond the region. The continuing illicit production and trafficking of drugs and the fact that the situation in Afghanistan continues to provide favourable conditions for terrorist bases and training camps can easily affect every country on the globe and represents a serious threat to international peace and security. This draft resolution therefore strongly demands that all parties, and in particular the Taliban, stop harbouring and permitting the training of terrorists and their organizations. All Afghan parties, and in particular the Taliban, are asked to support international efforts to bring indicted terrorists to justice. We repeat our call to all Afghan parties, in particular the Taliban, to put a stop to all illegal drug activities and to support international efforts to ban illicit drug production and trafficking.

Germany has always supported the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA). This draft resolution requests the Secretary-General to authorize the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan to continue its efforts to facilitate an immediate and durable ceasefire among the Afghan parties and to institute a negotiating process with all Afghan parties. It is important that UNSMA maintain and strengthen contacts with all the Afghan factions, in particular with the Taliban, as well as with all other interested parties and organizations, including neighbouring States and others concerned with Afghanistan. Germany also strongly supports the Secretary-General's proposal to add a new function to UNSMA. Thus, the draft before us endorses the Secretary-General's proposal to establish a separate civil affairs unit by adding a new monitoring function to UNSMA, with the primary objective of deterring grave violations of human rights and promoting respect for minimum humanitarian standards in the future. It is clear that this new monitoring function of UNSMA will not be easy to implement, and therefore today's draft resolution also endorses the Secretary-General's proposal to send an assessment mission to Afghanistan as soon as security conditions permit, in order to determine the exact mandate, composition and location of the civilian monitors. I wish to reconfirm that the work of this civil affairs unit will have Germany's full support.

Let me repeat what I said at the outset. We hope the draft resolution will be adopted by consensus. The General Assembly would thereby send a strong message to the Afghan parties and the States with influence in Afghanistan — a message, following the Security Council's adoption only yesterday of a resolution on Afghanistan, showing that the international community is

deeply concerned about the situation in Afghanistan; a message saying that we want the Afghan parties to renounce the military options and the States with influence in Afghanistan to use their influence constructively, in coordination with the United Nations, which we unanimously and strongly support; a message saying that we continue to care about the Afghan civilian population, their human rights and their suffering after almost 20 years of war; and a message expressing the strong will of the international community to bring peace back to Afghanistan.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): Speaking from this rostrum almost a year ago, the representative of Russia noted various encouraging signs with regard to the situation in and around Afghanistan. Those signs were related to direct contacts between Taliban members and certain members of the Government coalition; to intensified efforts by Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan; and to the increasingly active neighbours and friends of Afghanistan — the "six plus two" group — which was making possible practical action to bring about cessation of the armed conflict and begin a political dialogue aimed at national reconciliation. Regrettably, those fragile expectations were not justified, through the fault of the Taliban and its supporters outside the country.

Blatantly ignoring the clearly expressed will of the international community to assist in the peaceful settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan, and the desire of the Afghan people to reach a national accord and maintain the integrity of the country, the Taliban made another attempt to solve the Afghan problem by armed force, to extend their control over the whole territory of Afghanistan and to impose upon the people of that long-suffering country its regime based on religious fanaticism, extremism and intolerance for different ways of thinking.

Russia considers the escalation of the Taliban military action in the north of Afghanistan a real threat to the southern borders of the Commonwealth of Independent States, and, together with the other members of the Commonwealth, reserves the right to take all necessary measures to adequately secure its borders in compliance with the existing international legal obligations.

We are particularly angered by the fact that the military expansion of the Taliban in the north of Afghanistan is being carried out with the direct involvement of foreign military personnel with the Taliban side in planning, logistical support and military operations. This has been proved by concrete evidence, including the fact that a significant number of non-Afghan military personnel have been taken prisoner by the Government of the Islamic State of Afghanistan.

The extensive external military assistance only encourages the aggressive ventures of the Taliban, impairs the efforts of the international community to launch intra-Afghan negotiations and strengthens the claims of the Taliban to be the sole rulers of the country. It has led them to neglect the basic norms of civilized behaviour and to commit mass crimes.

Refusal to reach a stable ceasefire agreement; their unwillingness to cooperate with representatives of other political forces; assassinations of foreign diplomats, journalists and staff members of international organizations; mass persecution, forced displacements and even executions based on nationality or religious beliefs, including the slaughter in Mazar-e-Sharif and Bamyan; systematic and serious violations of human rights, including discrimination against girls and women; encouragement of illegal drug traffic; and support of international terrorism — these are just a few of the Taliban actions well known to the international community.

The new, even bloodier stage of the civil war unleashed by the Taliban, requires urgent and decisive measures to prevent further growth of the fratricidal conflict in Afghanistan and to forestall its spread to neighbouring countries.

The Taliban's strict compliance with the United Nations decisions, first of all on key issues of the Afghan settlement, is the only way to lay the foundation for constructive collaboration between them, and other Afghan parties, and the world community in order to establish a durable peace in Afghanistan.

The resolution the Security Council adopted unanimously yesterday contains a principled assessment of the Taliban actions and makes specific demands of the Taliban. It also expresses readiness to consider the imposition of measures, with the aim of achieving the full implementation of previous Council resolutions on Afghanistan. We note that the comprehensive draft resolution on Afghanistan currently being considered by the General Assembly also sends a clear message to the Taliban regarding the world community's view of how this long-term conflict should be resolved.

The Taliban leaders should long ago have realized the impossibility of solving the Afghan problem by military means. The Taliban should immediately cease military operations and, following the example of the Government coalition, agree to establish a long-term ceasefire and start serious negotiations on how to secure peace and national reconciliation in the country.

We fully share the Secretary-General's opinion that the Taliban cannot claim sole rule in such a multinational and multi-denominational country as Afghanistan. Their desire to limit officials of non-Pashtoon nationality who are loyal to them to nominal, secondary inclusion in their administration and to ignore representatives of influential socio-political forces and major ethnic and religious groups, does not solve the problem of creating a fully representative government. Such a government may be formed only after full-scale political negotiations involving representatives of the interests of all major political forces and segments of Afghan society.

Russia is of the opinion that the United Nations should play a decisive, coordinating and integrating role in the preparation of any plan for an Afghan settlement. In this context, we support Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi's efforts, undertaken on the basis of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. We also support the work of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA). We endorse the proposal of the Secretary-General to establish, within the framework of UNSMA, a civil affairs unit, whose primary objectives would be monitoring the situation, promoting respect for minimum humanitarian standards and deterring further mass violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

We continue to attach great hopes to the activities of the "six plus two" group, which will remain the principal international format for negotiations on the Afghan settlement. We emphasize the importance of thorough preparation for the upcoming meeting in Tashkent of the representatives of member countries, so that a single position towards the Taliban and other Afghan sides can be elaborated. Particularly, the members of that group could undertake to refuse to provide military support to the parties to the Afghan conflict and prevent the use of their territory for such purposes.

We support the appeal of the Secretary-General to provide comprehensive assistance to the population of Afghanistan. We welcome the fourth meeting of the Afghanistan Support Group which concluded yesterday, and in which representatives of donor countries, including Russia, as well as a number of international and non-governmental organizations, participated. We express the hope that the results of this meeting will contribute to the mobilization of international humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan.

The Russian Federation, despite its domestic economic difficulties, continues to provide humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. During 1997 and 1998, the Russian Ministry for the management of emergency situations repeatedly provided humanitarian aid to the people of Afghanistan affected by hostilities and an earthquake. The total amount of that aid was approximately $600,000.

We demand that the Taliban ensure the safety of international humanitarian personnel and secure their free access to all areas under their control in order to allow for the provision of assistance to all in need of it.

We support the Secretary-General's view regarding the need to pursue a unified and coordinated international strategy in the field of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, which would take into consideration both the urgent needs of the most vulnerable groups of the population and the requirements of strict respect for human rights, especially those of women.

Russia is prepared to cooperate constructively with all Afghan groups and interested countries in the settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan on the basis of the resolutions of the General Assembly and Security Council.

Mr. Sucharipa (Austria): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia — and the associated country Cyprus, as well as the European Free Trade Association countries members of the European Economic Area, Liechtenstein and Norway, align themselves with this statement.

Since last year's debate, the situation in war-torn Afghanistan has, unfortunately, not improved; it has further deteriorated. In spring and summer 1998, fighting again intensified. The conflict escalated, provoking alarming regional repercussions. As in the past, civilians were not spared — and, I might add, this seems to be part of the heinous strategy of the warring factions. Credible reports suggest that the grim pattern of

massacres and atrocities committed by combatants in this civil war has worsened. Thousands have been killed; whole communities have been displaced.

At the same time, efforts by the international community to help and support the victims of the conflict — the vast majority of the Afghan people — have been repeatedly impeded by factions whose political claims have become ever more doubtful, since their behaviour most often does not meet even a minimum of internationally accepted norms and standards.

On top of the war-inflicted deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, floods and strong earthquakes added to the misery of the Afghan people by causing massive loss of human life and destruction of homes, crops and food stocks.

Afghanistan continues to be a place where human rights and international humanitarian law do not seem to exist for parties that themselves wish to be treated with respect by the international community. But it is impossible to ignore the plight of innocent civilians — especially children, women, elderly people, and in general, the weaker and more vulnerable segments of society in Afghanistan — whose suffering is untold. The Afghan factions, which usually blame each other for this deplorable situation, must not expect the international community to accept their general lack of commitment to recognize, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms and respect for international humanitarian law.

If there is a sense of leadership left among the civil war factions and those who represent them, they must realize that it is their first and foremost responsibility to stop the killing, agree to a ceasefire, end impunity in their country and, honestly and in good faith, enter into negotiations aimed at a political settlement of the conflict. Those who keep holding to the belief that military success and the rule of violence and terror will finally bring peace to Afghanistan must be told that theirs is a distorted and inhuman vision — a vision bound to fail.

The Union condemns the continuing practice of outside interference in Afghanistan. Those Powers that keep interfering in Afghanistan's matters in a covert and most destructive manner by providing Afghan factions with all kinds of strategic and military support, including the involvement of military personnel, should know that their activities have, this year again, not remained unnoticed.

Being strongly committed to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Afghanistan, the European Union wishes to underline the particular responsibility of these third parties with regard to the situation in the country and in the region. We again urge all countries with an influence on the Afghan factions to use this influence in a positive and constructive manner in support of the United Nations peace efforts. We also wish to recall that the European Union continues to enforce the embargo on the export of arms, munitions and military equipment provided for in its common position of 17 December 1996 on Afghanistan, and we urge other countries to adopt a similar policy of restraint.

Lasting peace can be made, kept and built only in a spirit of reconciliation. A peaceful settlement for Afghanistan can be achieved only through dialogue and will have to aim at establishing a broad-based Government which represents the full diversity of Afghan society. It will not be found through further antagonizing religious and ethnic groups. The United Nations, and in particular the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Ambassador Brahimi, and the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan are doing their utmost to continue and promote the search for peaceful solutions to the conflict. But their efforts will, at best, have only limited results if the Afghan parties and those who continue to fuel the war in Afghanistan from outside only pay lip service to the restoration of peace in that country.

According to credible sources, Taliban militia groups were responsible for the gravest violations of human rights in the course of the fall of Mazar-e-Sharif and Bamyan this summer, thereby adding to the atrocities which have already been committed, particularly in northern Afghanistan in 1997 and 1998, by all sides involved in the conflict. Furthermore, the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan has further deteriorated, in particular in areas controlled by the Taliban, who continue to violate the human rights of women and girls, including through discriminatory policies.

We wish to reiterate that all this is a matter of deepest concern for the European Union. We should also like to stress the serious implications of continued discrimination, including denial of access to education and health facilities, employment outside the home and humanitarian assistance, for our future decisions regarding the distribution of aid.

The Union welcomes the joint effort of the Department of Political Affairs, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to prepare an investigation, to be carried out under the auspices of UNHCR, of reports on grave human rights violations.

The Union also strongly supports the Secretary-General's proposal, as outlined in his report of 23 November, to add a new function to United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan, whose primary objectives would be to monitor and promote respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, as well as to prevent violations of human rights in the future, and to that end establish a separate civil affairs unit within the Mission. We are looking forward with great interest to learning about the exact location, mandate and functioning of this unit after the return of the assessment team which the Secretary-General intends to dispatch to Afghanistan in this regard.

With deep concern, we have noticed an increasingly hostile attitude towards the community of foreign workers in Afghanistan this year, in particular among the Taliban, who have also taken the lead in imposing various restrictions on United Nations humanitarian agencies and international humanitarian organizations which have been operating in Afghanistan, thereby limiting access to humanitarian assistance for the country's needy civilian population. As a result of the Taliban's decision to forcibly close the offices of international non-governmental organizations in Kabul, these latter had to abandon their much-needed help for the misery-stricken civilian inhabitants of Kabul, who now suffer the consequences.

For the reasons just mentioned, the European Commission had to suspend funding for projects in Kabul. Being the major donor of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, we have helped the Afghan people through years of suffering and conflict. We earnestly desire to continue helping them. But aid can continue only where it can be delivered in an effective and principled manner, without discrimination, and where humanitarian organizations are able to carry out their work freely and safely.

The armed attack against two staff members of the United Special Mission to Afghanistan on 21 August 1998 in Kabul, which caused the death of an Italian national and left a French national injured, provided another, most shocking example of hostility towards the community of international workers in Afghanistan. The Security Council and the entire international community condemned this attack, together with the murder of two United Nations workers in Jalalabad. Despite urgent appeals to the Taliban to take immediate steps to investigate this heinous crime and to keep the United Nations informed of the results of the investigation, as requested by the Secretary-General in his statement of 24 August, there has been no tangible progress in this respect. The Union strongly urges the Taliban to fully and thoroughly cooperate in responding to inquiries concerning the murder and its investigation.

The fatal attacks on United Nations personnel and other threats to the safety and security of United Nations workers in Afghanistan, as well as systematic harassment, eventually forced the United Nations to withdraw its entire international staff from the country. The European Union fully supports the Secretary-General's call for credible assurances by the Taliban that they are willing and committed to ensuring the safety and security of United Nations personnel in the areas under their control as preconditions for the full resumption of United Nations activity in Afghanistan. In this connection, the European Union welcomes the United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan, which will provide an excellent, principle-centred basis for further strengthening the coordination of United Nations activities in Afghanistan once United Nations international staff is able to return.

Let me take this opportunity to commend the United Nations staff members who have been and are working in Afghanistan, for their outstanding performance under conditions of extreme hardship and insecurity. I should also like to pay tribute to those among them who lost their lives while carrying out their duties.

The killing of Iranian diplomats and the violation of the Vienna diplomatic and consular Conventions during the Taliban attack against Mazar-e-Sharif was yet another outrageous incident, which also caused tensions in the region to rise further. The Union condemned these cruel murders. We are deeply concerned about their alarming regional consequences. In this context, we would like to commend the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Brahimi, for successfully helping to ease those tensions when they had reached a peak. It will, however, require additional efforts from the Taliban's side to ensure a credible and thorough investigation of the crimes just mentioned. Furthermore, all sides concerned will have to exercise utmost restraint and comply with the

basic principles of international law to allow regional tensions to lessen.

The repercussions of the Afghan civil war reach far beyond Afghanistan and its neighbours. In the complete absence of governance, the economy of Afghanistan is today substantially dependent on illegal activities, such as and foremost the illicit production and trafficking of drugs and smuggling. The illegal drug business causes serious damage to the member States of the European Union and many countries elsewhere. We therefore remain committed to reinforcing the fight against illegal drugs in Afghanistan. However, the evacuation of international workers from Afghanistan has affected the implementation of relevant programmes.

Furthermore, lawlessness in Afghanistan continues to provide favourable conditions for terrorist bases and training camps. This situation obviously has negative implications for peace and security in the region and far beyond. The European Union regards the combating of international terrorism as a high-priority political objective, and terrorist organizations' links and connections to Afghanistan are no exception in this regard. We also reiterate our call upon all Afghan factions, and in particular the Taliban, to close down training camps for foreign terrorists inside Afghanistan, and to participate in and support international efforts to combat terrorism.

With regard to mine-clearing programmes in Afghanistan, the European Union urges all Afghan parties to support and participate in these programmes. Furthermore, the European Union strongly urges the Afghan factions to put a complete halt to the use of landmines, which continue, and will continue for a long time, to take a very heavy toll on innocent civilians, and to keep respective commitments.

Let me also underline that the cultural and historical relics and monuments of Afghanistan, including the famous statues of Buddha in Bamyan, belong to the common heritage of mankind. We wish to remind the Afghan factions, and in particular, again, the Taliban, that these relics and monuments have to be protected from theft, damage and acts of vandalism.

As expressed in our common position of 26 January 1998, the European Union is determined to play an effective role in efforts to stop the fighting and to restore peace, stability and respect for human rights and international principles in Afghanistan. We will therefore continue to give our full support to United Nations efforts to promote these goals, including to further action as deemed necessary by the Security Council.

We support the Secretary-General's endeavours aimed at keeping interested countries involved in the search for a solution to the conflict. Let me, in conclusion, express again our sincere appreciation to the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for his tireless diplomatic efforts and significant presence as a mediator, and to the members of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan, led by Mr. Ngobi, for their continued courage and dedication.

The European Union supports the draft resolution before us, which has been co-sponsored by all its members.

Mr. Burleigh (United States of America): The United States is pleased to have worked once again with the sponsors of a draft resolution on Afghanistan to arrive at a consensus text on the difficult situation in that country. It was not an easy task, and for this we are once again indebted to the German delegation for its astute leadership.

Some years ago, Mikhail Gorbachev referred to Afghanistan as "a bleeding wound". Unfortunately, though the context has changed, his dramatic metaphor is still deadly accurate. Once a buffer State and for 10 years an active cold-war battleground, Afghanistan is nearing its tenth year of civil war. An entire generation of Afghans has known little but war.

It is fashionable in some circles to regard the fighting in Afghanistan as the customary state of affairs in a faction-ridden country of warlike peoples. But this attitude ignores the fact that for much of their history, the Afghan people have known significant periods of unity and peace. While it is true that Afghans have used force to settle internal differences, outside powers also have had difficulty resisting involvement in intra-Afghan disputes, often with disastrous results.

As the Secretary-General's report (A/53/695) of 23 November 1998 on Afghanistan makes abundantly clear, the current Afghan struggle is by no means solely internal. It would be wrong, therefore, to dismiss Afghanistan as a hopeless case of another failed State, particularly when its distress is due in part — and here I quote the Secretary-General — to "persistent outside interference in the affairs of Afghanistan". (*A/53/695, para. 69*)

In the conclusion of his frank appraisal of the situation, the Secretary-General states that the United Nations, under the able leadership of Special Envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, will continue to promote a ceasefire and national reconciliation in Afghanistan. However, he adds, the United Nations cannot do the job alone. In recognition of this need, the United States last year joined with the Russian Federation and Afghanistan's six neighbouring States to form the "six plus two" group of countries, under the leadership of the Secretary-General.

We share the Secretary-General's disappointment that the six plus two countries have not yet been able to foster a political settlement in Afghanistan. But let us be frank and acknowledge that the six plus two group includes members that support different factions and have different interests and concerns that must be reconciled if there is to be peace in Afghanistan.

Two of the six plus two members, Iran and Pakistan, have had to carry a disproportionate burden of the decades-long struggle in Afghanistan. Both still host significant numbers of Afghan refugees living in their territories — nearly 3 million today. Unfortunately, despite the voluntary repatriation of more than 80,000 Afghan refugees this year, recent fighting in northern and central Afghanistan has created new internal displacements and fresh refugee flows to the neighbouring countries.

Just as Iran and Pakistan have borne the burdens of the Afghan conflict, we believe they also hold the key to its resolution. The United States joins other Governments, the United Nations and the six plus two countries in urging the two Governments to seek an accommodation on Afghanistan. They should resume the promising bilateral dialogue begun earlier this year and find ways to harmonize their interests. Other neighbouring Governments can play a positive role. In this connection, we strongly support the initiative of the Government of Uzbekistan to hold a meeting of the six plus two group in the region, with the possible participation of the Afghan factions.

For our part, the United States stands strongly behind the points of common understanding adopted by the Foreign Ministers of the six plus two group here at the United Nations on 21 September. The common points, together with recent Security Council resolutions, the General Assembly resolution to be adopted and the talking points approved by the six plus two group earlier this year, are a virtual blueprint for a comprehensive settlement of Afghanistan's problems. I commend these as our best reply to the false notion that these problems can be resolved by military means. They cannot.

Tragically, the conquest of most of Afghanistan by the Taliban movement has created new problems, rather than solving old ones. I refer in particular to the vicious attacks on the Hazara people of Mazar-e-Sharif, including the torture and the killing of thousands of innocent civilians. This has only sharpened ethnic hatreds and divisions among Afghans. It has also exacerbated differences between Iran and the Taliban, leading to a near outbreak of hostilities between them only weeks ago.

The United States joins others in condemning the murders of the eight Iranian diplomats and a journalist by Taliban troops during their takeover of Mazar-e-Sharif on 10 September. In this connection, we also support calls by the Security Council and in the resolution before us for a thorough investigation into this unacceptable violation of the Vienna Conventions on Diplomatic and Consular Relations, and we fully support demands to bring the perpetrators to justice.

We remain acutely concerned about the presence of international terrorists in Afghanistan.

We join the draft resolution's call on the Taliban to cease providing sanctuary and training for terrorists in the territory under their control. In particular, we call for the expulsion of terrorists such as Osama bin Laden, who, along with several associates, is under indictment in a United States court for their role in the murders of innocent Americans and other nationals in Africa and the Middle East. These killers must be brought to justice.

In addition to the threat of terrorism, the absence of organized government or law enforcement has allowed Afghanistan to become the world's second largest producer of illegal opium and heroin. This problem will have growing long-term consequences for Afghans, their neighbouring States and beyond.

Similarly, the world community stands ready to provide major reconstruction and essential assistance to help reintegrate Afghanistan into the community of nations. The United States, which at present channels substantial humanitarian aid to the Afghan people through the United Nations and its specialized agencies, stands ready to mobilize greater resources for aid, technical assistance, trade and investment to rebuild the country's economy. Unfortunately, this promise must await a political settlement. We look forward to the day when

Afghanistan and its neighbours can coalesce around the formation of a government which, first, has the support of its people; secondly, respects human rights, including the rights of women and girls; and, thirdly, accepts the principles of the United Nations Charter and the covenants to which Afghanistan is a signatory.

In closing, allow me to salute the work of the men and women of the United Nations, who have struggled over this past year to assist Afghanistan, despite many dangers, setbacks and the tragic loss of three staff members. We look to the United Nations, through the extraordinary efforts of Ambassador Brahimi, the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan and the United Nations humanitarian agencies, as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross and the many dedicated non-governmental organizations, to provide life-sustaining help to the people of Afghanistan, and to promote the ultimate hope of peace. This is the hope that sustains us and unites us with those determined to end the tragedy of Afghanistan.

Mr. Vural (Turkey): The political and humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan continues to be one of the international community's most preoccupying and pressing problems. Turkey enjoys strong bonds of friendship with the Afghan people and has an unselfish desire to see this tragically divided, war-torn country emerge as a stable, peaceful and prosperous nation. All the countries of the region, especially Afghanistan's neighbouring countries, suffer without exception from the negative consequences and implications of the Afghan conflict.

We very much regret that the international community's strong calls for a peaceful solution to the problem and the collective diplomatic efforts launched in that direction were blatantly ignored, especially by one of the parties to the conflict.

On the contrary, the conflict has taken on disturbing proportions. The prospect that it will spill over into the region carries with it the potential to threaten peace and security in South-West Asia. The problems emerging as by-products of the crisis, such as refugees, the illicit cultivation and trafficking of narcotic drugs and the sheltering of international terrorism, have assumed perilous transborder dimensions with international implications. In Afghanistan, drugs, terrorism and arms are creating a vicious circle, destructive to all, and the struggle against this vicious circle requires the political determination of all.

The ethnic and religious nature of the conflict has led to gross human rights violations, killings and displacements of populations in northern Afghanistan. In this respect, specific cases, such as the tragic murders of United Nations personnel and Iranian diplomats, remain to be thoroughly investigated by the Taliban. The Taliban's discriminatory behaviour towards girls, women and ethnic and religious groups is unacceptable by any standard.

The discontinuation of United Nations humanitarian assistance is adding to the suffering of the people. The displacement of local populations in northern Afghanistan and the dismantling of their economic infrastructure has created a dismal situation. The conditions for the resumption of United Nations humanitarian work must be created. The Taliban is expected to fulfil its commitments in this regard.

Military campaigns and outside interference have brought nothing but turmoil and destruction to Afghanistan throughout its history. The only viable solution to the problem remains the establishment of a broad-based, multi-ethnic government in which all the parties are represented. The parties can benefit from traditional methods, such as the *Loya Jirgah*, or from modern concepts that would lead to the establishment of a new representative body, acceptable to the people of Afghanistan. However, such a reconciliation process cannot resume unless a ceasefire is declared and a true dialogue begins among the parties. This stands as a primary task.

Collective diplomatic efforts, with the United Nations in the central role, continue to be the only efficient instrument which may lead the Afghan parties to a dialogue. The valuable activities of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, in this respect should be given the full and unanimous diplomatic backing of the international community. The joint work of the Organization of the Islamic Conference with the United Nations in Afghanistan constitutes a good example of cooperation within the international system. The "six plus two" group and the Group of 21 countries with influence in Afghanistan need to enhance their deliberations on the problem with a view to adopting a more harmonious position. The work of these two groups can be enriched by the engagement of all the Afghan parties.

My delegation believes that the Afghan people have the necessary historical experience to rebuild their unity

and harmony. Turkey has confirmed on many occasions its readiness to contribute, in collaboration with the international community, to such an outcome. I hope the draft resolution which the General Assembly will adopt, as well as the resolution adopted by the Security Council yesterday, will constitute a fresh step in this direction.

Mr. Konishi (Japan): Japan shares the deep concern of the international community at the fighting that has continued to rage in Afghanistan for two decades. Indeed, I regret to note that the parties to the conflict in Afghanistan have not shown any willingness to heed the voice of the international community and enter into direct negotiations towards a ceasefire or the achievement of peace. In August, the worsening security situation forced United Nations agencies to evacuate their personnel from Afghanistan. The Security Council responded by convening a meeting later that month, at which it adopted resolution 1193 (1998), and by issuing a presidential statement in September. The fact that those efforts have not resulted in any improvement in the situation is a source of grave concern. Japan hopes that the security situation in Afghanistan will significantly improve so that United Nations personnel can return to the region and resume their work as soon as possible.

In this connection, we welcome the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Taliban on the issues of privileges and immunities of United Nations staff and of access to health care and education. My delegation also highly values the strategic framework and the guideline paper entitled "Next Steps for the United Nations in Afghanistan", compiled by OCHA.

It is also worth noting here that the resolution on the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and protection of United Nations personnel was adopted by consensus on 7 December 1998 in this Assembly. The establishment of the Trust Fund for Security of United Nations personnel is a positive step, and we hope to see it utilized in Afghanistan in the near future.

I wish to convey to the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Brahimi, the sincere appreciation of the Government of Japan for his effective efforts in defusing the tensions between Iran and the Taliban in Afghanistan and neighbouring regions. Japan concurs with the view expressed in the report of the Secretary-General that it is necessary now to build upon the results of the efforts of his Special Envoy by dispatching a team to investigate the killing of the Iranian diplomats in Mazar-e-Sharif on 8 August. We also support the Secretary-General's proposal that the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA) monitor the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, provided that the safety and security of the members of this new unit are guaranteed and its mandate is clearly specified.

The Government of Japan continues to believe that, in addition to peacemaking, the United Nations must play a central role in addressing a range of issues in Afghanistan, including improving humanitarian conditions, providing assistance for internally displaced persons and refugees and combating the production and trafficking of illegal drugs.

For its part, Japan hosted in Tokyo, on 7 and 8 December, the fourth meeting of the Afghanistan Support Group, whose efforts are among those being made by the international community to complement those of the United Nations. With the participation of Member States and representatives of the United Nations and other organizations, including Mr. De Mello, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Japan, which chaired the meeting, finalized a summary of the discussions, appealing for a ceasefire and dialogue aimed at the establishment of a broad-based multi-ethnic Government, as well as the early and full return of international humanitarian personnel, provided that their security and safety is fully guaranteed. The Group reaffirmed its commitment to humanitarian assistance based on the strategic framework and principled common programming. It encouraged the non-governmental community to strengthen its own coordination mechanisms. It also addressed the issues of natural disasters, landmines, human rights and gender, as well as drugs.

I should like now to touch upon some other Japanese efforts to improve the situation in Afghanistan. The Japanese Government sent a political officer in 1988 to the United Nations Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan and another officer in 1996 to UNSMA. Since the civil war broke out in 1979, my Government has extended more than $400 million in assistance to Afghanistan. Beginning in the spring of this year, in collaboration with United Nations agencies, it has been engaged in the Azra and Tizin projects in eastern Afghanistan, which are designed to assist the return of refugees from neighbouring countries. At the fourth Afghanistan Support Group meeting in Tokyo, which I mentioned earlier, Japan announced that it would extend $1.5 million of grant assistance for grass-roots projects

over the next two years to support non-governmental organization programmes for Afghan refugees and displaced persons. My Government has also decided to provide $2 million to the Afghan projects to be implemented by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Japan supports the points of common understanding of the "six plus two" group, which encourage direct talks between the parties to the conflict with the aim of achieving an immediate ceasefire and national reconciliation. In that context, my Government has steadfastly and repeatedly called upon the parties concerned to exercise maximum restraint and strive to reach a peaceful settlement. On 23 September, Foreign Minister Komura spoke to Foreign Minister Aziz of Pakistan, asking that he relay to the Taliban Japan's strong view that the situation cannot be stabilized through military means, but only through a political solution. Two days later, on 25 September, he conveyed the same message to Foreign Minister Kharrazi of Iran. During the month of October, Japan repeated that message to the Taliban directly, and called upon it and the other parties to the conflict to heed the call of the international community to make good-faith efforts to protect human rights, halt the cultivation, production and trafficking of illegal drugs and suppress international terrorism. It hopes that all the countries concerned will take active initiatives to address those issues.

On this occasion, let me reiterate Japan's concern at reports that the great Buddhist statue in Bamyan has been damaged, and to call upon all parties to ensure that this precious cultural artifact is protected for future generations.

In closing, my delegation would like to express its appreciation to the German delegation for its active and constructive initiative in preparing and introducing the draft resolution, of which Japan has become a sponsor.

Mr. Elaraby (Egypt) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to express my thanks, on behalf of the Egyptian delegation, to the Secretary-General for the very complete report that we have received from him on the situation in Afghanistan. I should also like to thank him for the regular reports we received throughout last year, in accordance with paragraph 19 of resolution 52/211 B, on the progress made by United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA). These reports reflect the efforts of the Secretary-General himself and of his Special Envoy, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, to bring about a political settlement to the crisis in Afghanistan in all its dimensions and to secure respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence and national unity of Afghanistan, with full respect for its ancestral cultural and historical heritage.

The report paints a worrying picture of the constant worsening of the military situation, and makes it clear that the warring factions have resolutely opted for the military option in order to secure control.

The reports describe the various leaders' appetite for power and their determination not to share the rulership of the country, to the detriment of the interests of the Afghan people, who have suffered war and its consequences for 18 years now.

There is also an indication of foreign intervention and of assistance to the warring factions. This was made clear when Kyrgyz authorities intercepted a train carrying armaments and munitions which was heading towards Afghanistan. This is in addition to the continuation of unidentified aircraft taking off and landing at airbases under the control of various factions.

Egypt is convinced of the necessity to stop the flow of arms and munitions into Afghanistan. This is one of the main factors that would create an opportunity for a political settlement without foreign intervention by neighbouring countries or others that have economic or security interests in seeing the present situation continue in Afghanistan.

The military successes of the Taliban movement have imposed a fait accompli and have made it harder to achieve a political settlement. This is why the international community and, in particular, the regional parties should step up their efforts to open a serious dialogue among the parties concerned and to raise awareness of the importance of showing flexibility and giving primacy to Afghan national interests over tribal and personal interests in order to establish a broad-based and fully representative government.

Since the killing of Iranian diplomats working in the Iranian Consulate at Mazar-e-Sharif, there has been a resurgence of acute tension between Afghanistan and Iran. The situation was made worse by the tendency of some of the tribes to carry out attacks on the personnel of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA), causing the Mission to evacuate all international staff members.

Egypt energetically condemned the killing of the Iranian diplomats and the attacks on United Nations personnel resulting in the death of the Deputy Military Adviser as well as of employees of the World Food Programme and of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Jalalabad. Egypt categorically condemns these attacks and calls for the perpetrators to be arrested and brought to justice as soon as possible.

At the same time, there is a need to strengthen the efforts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to make it possible for all refugees to return, to step up the demining activities and to prevent the production of drugs, since it is clear that the land area that is being cultivated for this purpose has risen by 9 per cent in the course of the last year.

Afghanistan must also be prevented from harbouring and training terrorists, subsequently exporting terrorism to neighbouring and other States.

Of course, all these activities require a return of United Nations personnel to Afghanistan, and they must be protected from attacks on their safety and security. We hope that the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General will be able to undertake efforts to this end as soon as possible.

The worsening human rights situation in Afghanistan is a cause of grave concern to the Government of Egypt because it accentuates ethnic and religious divisions between the various Afghan factions. Egypt attaches great importance to the Taliban's carrying out investigations and publishing their results. Failing this, there will need to be an international investigation on mass murders and the perpetrators will have to be brought to trial.

We believe that the promotion of basic humanitarian norms and the prevention of massive violations of human rights in the future cannot be attained without easing ethnic tensions, putting a stop to the flow of arms and munitions, and creating a rational rapprochement and national unity among the parties in Afghanistan. Therefore, we feel that the designation of civilian human rights observers in Afghanistan at this time is not necessary, especially in view of the very shaky security situation there.

Egypt is carefully following the activities of the "six plus two" group, which was established in order to facilitate a solution in Afghanistan, and we noted and welcomed the ministerial meeting held in September.

We share the frustrations of the Secretary-General concerning the powerlessness of some countries to bring the warring parties together and to agree on ways of stopping the flow of munitions and weapons, which fans the flames of conflict in Afghanistan. We hope that the group will strive towards building a society in which peace and justice will reign and not resort to a military solution.

We also welcome the meetings of the 21 countries that have influence in Afghanistan, the most recent of which was held in October. Egypt is striving to assist Afghanistan to regain peace and security, and to maintain sovereignty, independence, national unity and territorial integrity.

Egypt hopes that all States will attach the greatest possible importance to this issue. Moreover, Egypt stresses the importance of providing the necessary economic assistance to Afghanistan. We also follow with great interest the discussions that have taken place in the Security Council on the question of Afghanistan, which led to the adoption of resolution S/1214 (1998), many of whose provisions are reflected in the draft resolution now before the Assembly, which calls for a peaceful settlement in the nearest possible future, which can be achieved if external parties and the Afghan factions alike commit themselves to its observance.

In conclusion, allow me to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, for his sustained efforts throughout the last year, and also to praise the courage and perseverance of United Nations personnel working in Afghanistan, who have admirably fulfilled their mission in extremely difficult circumstances.

Mr. Nejad Hosseinian (Islamic Republic of Iran): I wish to begin by thanking the Secretary-General for his report contained in document A/53/695, and also his Special Envoy, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, for all his efforts. I would like to place on record that we are very grateful to him and his colleagues in the Department of Political Affairs and the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA) for their tireless efforts, which removed some of the additional problems in Afghanistan caused by the murder of Iranian diplomats and a journalist by the Taliban in Mazar-e-Sharif on 8 August this year. Ambassador Brahimi's mission succeeded in securing the return of the bodies of the Iranians killed and the release of those interned in Afghanistan.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is determined to see to it that those responsible for the cold-blooded murder of its diplomatic personnel and the correspondent of the Islamic Republic News Agency in Mazar-e-Sharif are apprehended and brought to justice in keeping with international standards of fair trial.

This is a very important pending issue between Iran and the Taliban. In this connection, the Secretary-General has also expressed, in paragraph 72 of his report, his sincere hope that his "Special Envoy's achievements will continue to be built upon, *inter alia*, by prosecuting those responsible for the murders".

The core problem in Afghanistan, however, goes beyond the Iranian-related issue, and centres around the threat which the status quo in Afghanistan poses to regional and international peace and security on the one hand and the unacceptable, inhumane and horrifying situation to which millions of Afghan people are now subjected on the other. Yesterday, the Permanent Representative of Pakistan and I had the opportunity to make statements in the Security Council on the question of Afghanistan. He lamented, and I agree with him, that "Pakistan has also been a victim of terrorism, drug trafficking and arms smuggling as a result of conditions inside Afghanistan" (*S/PV.3952, p.24*). This is exactly what all neighbours of Afghanistan fear about the continuation of the status quo in Afghanistan. I venture to suggest that the regional instability resulting from conditions inside Afghanistan is likely to increase and to foment further ethnic and religious hatred and violence in the wider region. Areas of serious concern for the international community in general and for most of Afghanistan's neighbours in particular with respect to the continuation of the status quo in that country include the following: the destabilizing effects for the region of continued conflict and the insistence of the Taliban on a military solution; the rejection of a ceasefire and of all efforts aimed at finding a political solution; the methodical killing spree by the Taliban aimed at members of ethnic and religious minorities in northern Afghanistan; the continued door-to-door manhunt for members of the Hazara community; the Taliban's brute-force rule, which creates a big prison for the Afghan people, including the regular Pashtoons; the deteriorating situation of women and girls in all areas under the control of the Taliban — women and girls continue to be denied access to adequate health care, education, employment and, at times, humanitarian assistance; the increasing problem of drug production and trafficking as the main internal source of income to finance the war effort; the harbouring of terrorists, including those operating against neighbouring countries; the Taliban leadership's harbouring of territorial claims over several cities in neighbouring States, despite the internal chaos and other preoccupations; and the fomenting of ethnic and religious hatred and disturbance not only in Afghanistan but also in neighbouring countries.

These issues are real and have been substantiated by a preponderance of evidence and eyewitness accounts. The fact that the Taliban have closed northern Afghanistan to the outside world for four months does not simply make these issues go away.

In response to these areas of continuing grave concern, the Security Council yesterday adopted its resolution 1214 (1998), because the Taliban have refused to heed the repeated call by the international community and by the United Nations to halt the fighting and enter into a political dialogue aimed at establishing a truly broad-based, multi-ethnic and fully representative government, despite the good-faith efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General and his meeting with the Taliban leader. In the same vein, the General Assembly is today considering the question of Afghanistan.

The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to believe that, because of the historical realities and the traditional and multi-ethnic structure of Afghanistan, only a genuinely broad-based, multi-ethnic and fully representative government which protects the rights of all Afghan people without distinction can bring peace and normalcy to Afghanistan and begin to remove the serious concerns I have just enumerated. The Taliban's claim that it is a multi-ethnic group is absurd. The suggestion that the Taliban has expressed readiness to broaden its ethnic dispensation — which, of course, would mean the Taliban leadership hand-picking some ethnic individuals — does not convince anyone, including the Afghan people.

My Government is committed to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Afghanistan. While the ultimate responsibility for bringing about peace and thus allaying the concerns of the international community, in particular those of neighbouring countries, lies with the people of Afghanistan, my Government supports and continues to cooperate with United Nations efforts, particularly those of Ambassador Brahimi, which have a central role to play in reaching the goals of national reconciliation and a lasting political settlement with the participation of all parties to the conflict and all segments of Afghan society.

In that connection, we support the initiative by the Government of Uzbekistan to facilitate the process of reconciliation by preparing the ground for a meeting of the "six plus two" group in Tashkent.

The treacherously long and cold winter in Afghanistan is bound to take a heavy toll on the Afghan people, particularly those displaced in central and northern Afghanistan. Emergency humanitarian relief assistance, particularly food, clothing, medicine and shelter, is in great demand in Afghanistan. We commend the Secretary-General for the coordination of all international efforts to deliver emergency assistance to Afghan people who need it, despite the problems faced by international and United Nations staff. We appreciate the efforts to overcome security problems in Afghanistan in order to allow the return of United Nations staff to Afghanistan to effectively resume the unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan. We also hail the meeting of donor countries that was concluded yesterday in Tokyo, and support the appeal to all States and to the international community at large to ensure that all humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan is coordinated with the United Nations and that it integrates the principle of non-discrimination among beneficiaries.

In the light of what I have said, my delegation is a sponsor of draft resolution A/53/L.66. I wish to place on record our appreciation to the delegation of Germany for the wide and long consultations and coordination efforts they carried out on this draft resolution.

Mr. Allmov (Tajikistan) (*interpretation from Russian*): The Republic of Tajikistan is gravely concerned at developments in and around neighbouring Afghanistan. We regret that for more than two years now the many appeals by the international community, including through General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, for a peaceful settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan have been ignored by the Taliban leadership, which has rejected negotiations and has continued to bank on a military solution to the Afghan problem, with direct and massive support from outside. Such acts by the Taliban have resulted in fierce resistance from their opponents in Afghanistan, a situation that is fraught with a new, more dangerous and brutal increase in military confrontation and an even greater receding of the prospects for the establishment of peace and stability on Afghan territory.

In their desire to establish sole control over the entire territory of Afghanistan through force, and in the practice of barbaric customs reminiscent of the Middle Ages, the Taliban are committing flagrant violations of human rights and international law, including international humanitarian law. It was with repulsion that we learned of the report of the Taliban's barbaric assassinations of Iranian diplomats and a journalist in Mazar-e-Sharif. We are deeply repulsed by the reports of wholesale massacres of prisoners of war and civilians in the north of Afghanistan and by the Taliban's brutal persecution of representatives of various ethnic and religious groups, as well as their discrimination against women. Such practices must be brought to a halt, and the culprits of those deeds must be prosecuted and punished.

The murder of the Iranian diplomats has already escalated tension in the region. We do not rule out the possibility that the Taliban's acts may further exacerbate the situation and lead to armed incidents on the Tajik-Afghan border and mass, uncontrolled flows of refugees into our country, which could include former participants in military operations and, as recent events in the Leninabad area have illustrated, could mean serious complications for the future of the peace process in our country.

When one takes into account the growing trend of turning the territory of Afghanistan into a bastion of religious extremism, a refuge for international terrorists and a world centre of drug- trafficking, it is evident that the alarming situation that exists in that country has created a threat to security not only in regional terms but also in the broader international context.

All of what I have said confirms the correctness of the political conclusion, drawn almost two years ago by the leadership of the group of countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States known as the Almaty five, that the acts of the Taliban can constitute a threat to peace and stability throughout the entire region of Central and South Asia. Recent events in the north of Afghanistan have also borne out the timeliness of the decision to create a troika comprised of the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to counteract religious extremism.

The Government of Tajikistan, basing itself on the fact that the present threat must not be allowed to undermine the process of national reconciliation, has adopted measures to strengthen the Tajik-Afghan border in sectors of heightened danger. We are prepared to take appropriate measures to protect our common interests and security, together with our partners in the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Tajikistan welcomes the active involvement of the United Nations in efforts to bring about a settlement of the Afghan conflict, and we fully support the efforts undertaken in this context by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Ambassador Brahimi.

We have co-sponsored Security Council resolutions 1076 (1996) and 1193 (1998) and all General Assembly resolutions on Afghanistan, including the draft resolution currently before the Assembly.

Tajikistan's position on an Afghan settlement is well known. It is essential to have an immediate ceasefire and to conduct peace negotiations with the participation of representatives of all opposing groups on an equal footing, so as to create a broad-based coalition government in Afghanistan that will protect the interests of all political, ethnic and religious groups of the country's population. The peace process in Afghanistan must be begun and conducted under the auspices of the United Nations and with the participation of the group of neighbours and friends of Afghanistan known as the "six plus two" group. We hope that the forthcoming meeting in Tashkent of representatives of that group of States will make a contribution to an intra-Afghan settlement. Tajikistan, for its part, is prepared to help those efforts in every possible way.

Mr. Farhâdi (Afghanistan): Last year, the General Assembly adopted resolution 52/211 by consensus, and the people of Afghanistan once again placed their hopes in the United Nations to finally broker a negotiation process that would lead to peace and security. Unfortunately, the hegemonic policy of Pakistan, by patronizing the bellicose and rejectionist attitude of the Taliban, once again dashed any hopes for peace and security in Afghanistan. These policies have not only caused great suffering to our countrymen, but they have also generated a notable degree of fear and instability among the countries of the region, as we have heard from some our colleagues at this meeting.

This fear of instability has its roots in the real intentions and adventurist policy of Pakistan in the region and also in the spread of a retrograde and reactionary brand of Talibanism in the form of "Taliban internationalism", a doctrine that in certain parts of the globe has transformed a certain terrorist into an immortal hero. In fact, it is the hegemonic policy of Pakistan that has continuously prompted the legitimate reaction of the countries in the region.

Last year's resolution on Afghanistan contained lofty and superb ideas about peace and security in Afghanistan and the region. It also expressed concerns about some negative developments in Afghanistan that have serious detrimental effects on the region and beyond. The ideas and concerns reflected in the resolution are mainly as follows: first, continued violations of human rights and international humanitarian law; secondly, continued foreign intervention and involvement of foreign military personnel; thirdly, continued use of Afghan territory for the training and harbouring of terrorists and terrorist organizations; fourthly, continued production of drugs and expansion of drug-trafficking networks; and, fifthly, the need for the continued appeal that there is no military solution to the Afghan conflict.

Allow me briefly to elaborate, one by one, on the points I have mentioned and to bring to light the truth about who has done what in Afghanistan during the past year.

Gross and flagrant abuses of human rights by the Taliban have been reported by Amnesty International; Human Rights Watch; Mr. Paik, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan; and the world media. Those reports have provided detailed information about the Taliban's total disregard for the life, liberty and security of the population under its military occupation, particularly gender apartheid and an array of discriminatory policies toward major ethnic groups in Afghanistan.

On 12 March 1998, Mr. Paik submitted his report, contained in document E/CN.4/1998/71, to the Commission on Human Rights. He had visited a number

of provinces inside Afghanistan, including the capital, Kabul, occupied by the Taliban mercenary group since September 1996. The Special Rapporteur realized that the situation of human rights had deteriorated, especially in the areas under the control of the Taliban. In paragraph 19 of the report, we read that Kabul has virtually turned into a "ghost town". Men and women alike fear being stopped or harassed by the Taliban police, and this, coupled with the drastic reduction in the population's purchasing power owing to the devaluation of Afghan currency as a result of the disastrous economy of war, has rendered the city streets practically deserted, even in the middle of the day. Human rights abuses, according to the observation of the Special Rapporteur in Kabul, have become more institutionalized, more systematic and more insidious. It is very sad that some representatives here have spoken of the "Kabul authorities".

With regard to the human rights of women and girls and their right to education, employment and access to health services, the Special Rapporteur indicates in paragraph 25 that nothing has changed for the better. The religious police harass and beat unaccompanied women, and a four-year-old boy is acceptable as a chaperone for an educated adult woman. In fact, the Associated Press reported on 2 December that a new Taliban rule has ordered buses carrying only women to be shrouded in curtains to hide the driver from the female passengers.

It is worth mentioning here that the Special Rapporteur indicated that before the occupation of Kabul by the Taliban mercenaries, women accounted for 70 per cent of all teachers, about 50 per cent of civil servants and an estimated 40 per cent of medical doctors. In addition, well over 5,000 students, about half of all students in Kabul University, were girls.

As to violations of international humanitarian law, crimes against humanity, crimes of war, genocide and "ethnic cleansing" by the Taliban mercenaries, the international news media and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, particularly in his report of 26 October 1998, have amply written about them. The Special Rapporteur, in his account of the Taliban invasion and occupation of Mazar-e-Sharif on 8 August 1998, — and this was mentioned by many of my colleagues here — uses the term "killing frenzy" when referring to an incident described in an article, dated 1 November 1998, that was published in *The Sunday Times* (London), entitled "How the Taliban slaughtered 8,000". The systematic and planned killing, deportation, rape, summary execution, abduction, arbitrary detention and looting was perpetrated by the Taliban while Pakistani military personnel accompanied and assisted the Taliban. The Special Rapporteur specifically referred to them as "Punjabi Taliban", indicating their origin to be the Pakistani province of Punjab.

The estimated total number of those killed in the Mazar-e-Sharif "killing frenzy" ranges from 8,000 to 12,000. However, a Human Rights Watch report states that that incident

> "represents one of the single worst examples of killing of civilians in Afghanistan's 20-year war" (*"Afghanistan: The massacre in Mazar-e-Sharif"; November 1998, Vol. 10, No. 7*).

Unfortunately, all of this continues to happen in a country that half a century ago actively contributed to the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Secondly, last year's resolution firmly expressed its concerns about foreign intervention in Afghanistan and called upon all States to refrain from intervening in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. In addition, Security Council resolution 1193 (1998) of 28 August 1998 called upon all States to take resolute measures to prohibit their military personnel from planning and participating in military operations in Afghanistan. Yet, in total defiance of the desire expressed by the international community, the Pakistani military intelligence service — Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) — and Pakistani military personnel have become more active in the Taliban military operations inside Afghanistan, with the malicious purpose of realizing what an Indian-weary-Pakistan has always called "strategic depth", as openly declared by the then Pakistani Foreign Minister, Gohar Ayub Khan, in an interview published last July in the Egyptian daily *Al-Ahram*.

The massive involvement of Pakistani military units in August 1998 in northern Afghanistan and the capture of hundreds of Pakistani prisoners of war — confirmed by visits by the United Nations Special Mission to

Afghanistan (UNSMA) and the Special Rapporteur — are undeniable evidence of Pakistani aggression in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, international television, including CNN, showed numerous Pakistanis injured by the Tomahawk missiles which targeted terrorist centres inside Taliban-held territories of Afghanistan. CNN also showed the leader of the notorious Pakistani extremist organization Harkat-ul-Mujahideen — formerly Harkat-ul-Ansar — during a press conference at which he stated that he would launch acts of revenge because his men had been killed by the missiles.

In addition, the day after the missile attacks, on 21 August 1998, Lieutenant Colonel Carmine Calo, the military adviser of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan — an Italian national — was brutally gunned down by two Pakistani terrorists, assigned to Kabul along with hundreds of other Pakistani terrorists. I wish to convey the heartfelt sympathy of my delegation and my Government to the family of Lieutenant Colonel Carmine Calo.

The report of the Secretary-General dated 2 October 1998 mentions that

> "UNSMA has received reports of large numbers of non-Afghans, most of allegedly Pakistani origin, engaging in all aspects of the fighting alongside the Taliban." (*A/53/455, para. 7*)

It further reads that "UNSMA has been shown and has interviewed in Bamyan a number of captured fighters", all of whom "admitted to being Pakistani" (ibid.). Thus, as we outlined in our letters annexed to document A/53/468, it is quite clear that without the active involvement of Pakistani military personnel, numbering well beyond 35,000, which, *inter alia*, operate training camps and administrative networks, the Taliban subjugation of parts of Afghan territory and of its people would not be taking place.

Therefore, we take this opportunity to once again express our disappointment over the attitude of the United Nations, which has thus far avoided straightforward mention of the Pakistani military presence and involvement in Afghanistan. The United Nations has not yet decided to investigate this specific matter and numerous other events, in spite of requests made by the Islamic State of Afghanistan.

The term "private adventurers fighting for a cause" (ibid.) was, unfortunately, mentioned in the Secretary-General's report in reference to the Pakistani fighters in Afghanistan. This reminds us of another United Nations term used when the former Soviet Union's troops were present in Afghanistan. The United Nations did not dare express clearly then that the former Soviet Union had to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan. Rather, the United Nations used the term "foreign troops", which it said must withdraw from Afghanistan. The term "private adventurers" may have satisfied and may continue to satisfy some United Nations bureaucrats who, in line with the spirit prevailing during the cold-war era, wish to avoid offending sensibilities. However, in the light of the Pakistani military presence in Afghanistan, the people of Afghanistan and those still interested in the development of Afghanistan laugh at such a masquerade of demagoguery.

Regarding concerns as to the use of the Afghan territory for the training and harbouring of terrorists: for the past four years, from this very rostrum, we have warned the international community about the existence of terrorist training camps, established and operated in occupied parts of Afghanistan with the active involvement of the Pakistani military intelligence service, Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI). We are thankful to Mr. Norbert Holl, the former head of UNSMA, who in his 14 November 1997 report stated

> "United Nations employees also reported an encounter with an unidentified foreign military training unit of several hundred persons near Kabul." (*A/52/682, para. 18*)

Once theoretical training is completed, ISI provides practical training sessions for the terrorist trainees in these camps so they can participate in battles against the forces of the Islamic State of Afghanistan. After acquiring sufficient knowledge and battle experience in Afghanistan — including by killing civilians — these terrorists are dispatched to other countries of the region and beyond.

The television footage after the Tomahawk missiles hit Afghanistan on 20 August showed that only Pakistani and some private Arab extremists were killed. By using Afghan soil as a terrorist training camp from which — through the utility of certain elements — war is declared against a third country, the Pakistani ISI has endangered the life and property of innocent Afghans. In fact, the cold-blooded murder of Lieutenant-Colonel Calo, the Italian Military Adviser to UNSMA, by designated Pakistanis in Kabul, the day after the Tomahawk missile attacks, presents a gloomy reality that requires deep pondering.

In addition, in his memorandum annexed to document A/53/539, dated 26 October 1998, the Special Rapporteur reported that 10 Iranian diplomats and the correspondent of the Islamic Republic News Agency were killed when Taliban forces and persons allied with them, described by the Rapporteur as "Punjabi Taliban", entered the Iranian Consulate in Mazar-e-Sharif, on the first day of the Taliban takeover of the city, 8 August. The only Iranian survivor of the Mazar massacre able to reach his country testified that the leader of those who stormed the Iranian Consulate was conversing in the Pakistani Urdu language when giving instructions to the gang.

As regards concerns about the production and trafficking of drugs: in his statement on 8 June 1998 before the twentieth special session of the General Assembly, on the world drug problem, President Burhanuddin Rabbani of Afghanistan, on the basis of the teachings of Islam, declared drugs or substances harmful to the mind or the body as injurious to human beings, be they members of a Muslim or non-Muslim society, because "reason and intellect are gifts of God" (*A/S-20/PV.2, p. 17*). In his statement of 29 September before this Assembly, the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, Mr. Abdullah, warned of an evil triangle haunting our region, a triangle between, first, the Pakistani military Inter-Service Intelligence; secondly, branches of international terrorism and Pakistani politico-military drug-traffickers; and, thirdly, the infamous Taliban mercenaries. Drug production in Taliban-held territories is estimated at more than 96.3 per cent of the total Afghan output. This increase is due to the institutionalization of a tax on poppy cultivation and exports by the Taliban, closely monitored by Pakistani traffickers as a lucrative business — maybe the only lucrative business in Pakistan.

Last year a state of euphoria was prevailing among some officials of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) as a result of the signing of a memorandum of understanding with the Taliban, designed to reduce poppy production in Taliban-held areas. Pakistani mouthpieces and some United Nations officials were announcing with fanfare their success with the memorandum of understanding. Disappointingly, yet realistically, the same UNDCP officials have complained this year about a 9 per cent increase in the cultivable land devoted to poppy growing in the Taliban-controlled territories of Afghanistan.

As concerns the cultural heritage of Afghanistan: this year, acts of vandalism by the Taliban against the cultural heritage of Afghanistan have continued unabated. The looting and plunder of the national archives in the capital, Kabul, which had remained safe and intact despite years of foreign-sponsored proxy wars, resulted in many items being offered for sale by Pakistani traffickers in secret dealings.

The deliberate shelling of one of the two colossal Buddha statues in Bamyan — there are two colossal Buddhas in Bamyan — by the invading Taliban troops after they entered the city in September shocked the world. The burning down of Naser Khisraow-e-Balkhi Library in Pul-e-Khumry in November — a library that stored more than 55,000 volumes in the Persian language, along with many irreplaceable and original manuscripts — was a serious blow to the face of the human cultural heritage.

I draw the Assembly's attention to the declaration of Mr. Federico Mayor, the Director-General of UNESCO, in this matter.

With regard to concerns about the advocacy of a military solution to the Afghan conflict: opting for a military solution to the problem of Afghanistan by becoming an instrument of Pakistani regional hegemony, the Taliban continued their military occupation of Afghanistan. The Taliban's refusal to negotiate an internationally advocated political settlement with the Government of the Islamic State of Afghanistan left the intra-Afghan dialogue unfruitful. In May of this year, despite the Secretary-General's appeal to continue the negotiations, the Taliban unilaterally and abruptly

abandoned the United Nations-supervised joint Steering Committee meeting held in Islamabad between the two conflicting sides.

Let us remember that Mr. Norbert Holl had already reported on the bellicose and warmongering attitude of the Taliban mercenaries. The Secretary-General's report of 16 March 1997 states,

> "The Taliban, judging both from their words and from their activities on the ground, appear determined to gain military and political control of the whole of Afghanistan and to establish their vision of an Islamic State." (*A/51/838, para. 7*)

The report indicated that many countries view this as a serious threat to their borders and to the peace and security of the region.

I would like to make a very brief comment about the latest report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, dated 2 October 1998 (A/53/455). First, events in Afghanistan develop rapidly. The latest massive uprisings during October, November and December of this year throughout the Taliban-occupied territories of northern Afghanistan have put an end to the Taliban military drive which began in July 1998. As a result, many areas have been liberated. The massive participation and volunteer service by local populations in the occupied territories to assist the armed forces of the Islamic State of Afghanistan in their fight against Pakistani aggression and intervention, as well as against the Pakistani mercenaries called the Taliban, are the most distinctive characteristics of the new developments in Afghanistan. Awareness of the true nature of the Taliban as the military tool of Pakistan, however, is not limited only to the Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras of the northern and central populations of Afghanistan, but exists also among the Pashtoons themselves in eastern and southern Afghanistan. Yet the two recent reports of the Secretary-General do not provide any insight or information about the affiliation of certain Pashtoon leaders with the leadership of the armed forces of the Islamic State of Afghanistan, which have recently liberated areas in the east.

We are thankful to Mr. Paik, the Special Rapporteur. Paragraph 32 of document E/CN.4/1998/71, of 12 March 1998, indicates that he was told that "the inhabitants of Kandahar city", headquarters of the Taliban and home to the Taliban leader, "were not trusted by the Taliban since the Taliban were viewed as occupiers by the people". This is significant because even Afghanistan's ethnic Pashtoons are suspicious of Taliban loyalty.

Secondly, placing equal blame on all Afghan leaders and all sides would be considered unjust and unfair in light of the realities in Afghanistan. The Islamic State of Afghanistan is defending its sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence and has all along declared its readiness to solve the conflict through peaceful means and negotiations. To equate the Islamic State of Afghanistan with the Taliban mercenary group is an insult and is also against the Charter of the United Nations and the principle of equality of Member States of the United Nations. We are not a faction, and calling us a faction would be inequitable. Equating the Islamic State of Afghanistan, which continues to defend its sovereignty while the Taliban, a mercenary force, are trying to implement the expansionist policy of Pakistan, is a slap in the face of human civilization. It is also the indissoluble right of an independent State to coexist in the family of nations, without any foreign coercion. It would be a blunder to consider instruments of tyranny, mercenaries of a foreign country, instigators of international terrorism, profiteers of illicit drugs, promoters of gender apartheid and champions of intolerance equal to civilized individuals such as those of us here. To equate justice with injustice means to side with injustice.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan, by co-sponsoring this draft resolution, reconfirms its commitment to support the United Nations peace process. We highly value the efforts of the General Assembly and of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi, aimed at bringing peace to Afghanistan and establishing a broad-based Government.

Before concluding, I ask the Assembly's indulgence to allow me briefly to update the contents of my statement, in the light of new events. In the first place, the Security Council adopted resolution 1214 (1998) yesterday evening, 8 December, on the situation in Afghanistan. The Islamic State of Afghanistan welcomes

and expresses its support for this Security Council resolution and its commitment to cooperate fully towards its implementation.

Paragraph 15 of the Council resolution, which expresses the Council's readiness to consider the imposition of measures with the aim of achieving the full implementation of United Nations resolutions on Afghanistan, is of paramount importance.

Secondly, the Islamic State of Afghanistan welcomes the declaration of the Afghanistan Support Group's fourth annual meeting, held in Tokyo, Japan, on 7 and 8 December 1998, about which Ambassador Konishi just has given us some information, for which I am thankful. The participants in the Tokyo meeting of the Afghanistan Support Group supported the United Nations peace process and expressed their concern about the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and the right of Afghan women and girls to education and employment.

I would like to conclude by expressing my delegation's sincere thanks to the German delegation for its untiring efforts to coordinate the work of preparing the draft resolution before us today. We are also grateful to all of the sponsors of the draft resolution. In addition, we are very grateful to all those Ambassadors and representatives who supported and underlined the importance of the draft resolution we will have to adopt today.

Mr. Kamal (Pakistan): My delegation is grateful to the Secretary-General for his report of 23 November 1998, in document A/53/695, on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security. The report, covering military, political, humanitarian and social developments in Afghanistan, shows that there have been both positive and negative developments in Afghanistan over the last year.

The most notable development this year has been the substantial change in the ground situation in Afghanistan following the take over by the Kabul authorities of Mazar-e-Sharif on 8 August 1998 and of Bamyan in central Afghanistan on 30 September 1998. According to the Secretary-General's report, as of September 1998, the Kabul authorities had taken control of most of the country, and the United Front, with the exception of the fighters under the command of Ahmed Shah Massoud, appears to have been largely eliminated as a viable force.

Pakistan does not favour a military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan and places the highest importance on endeavours for the restoration of peace in Afghanistan. It is encouraging that nearly 90 per cent of the area of Afghanistan which is under the control of the Kabul regime is now peaceful. There is a need to recognize this reality and to deal with the Kabul authorities, who are the effective Government in Afghanistan, in the interest of promoting and consolidating peace in that country. The tendency to turn way from this reality will neither serve the objective of restoring peace nor alleviate the extreme economic hardships which the Afghan people have been suffering on account of two decades of devastation caused first by the prolonged and brutal Soviet occupation and then by the power struggle among warlords.

Pakistan is deeply concerned over the killings of innocent women and children in the fratricidal conflict in Afghanistan. In particular, we are deeply concerned over the continued pounding of Kabul by the forces of Commander Ahmed Shah Massoud. According to the figures of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA), a total of more than 130 rockets landed in the Kabul area during the period from 1 June to 20 October this year. The Secretary-General's report also reveals that on, 20 and 21 September 1998 alone, nine Luna rockets landed in a residential area in the city of Kabul, killing more than 190 people. These and other killings are regrettable and must stop immediately.

Pakistan has condemned the killings of the Iranian Consulate-General personnel in Mazar-e-Sharif this year, as well as the killings of two UNSMA officials, a Political Affairs Officer and a Deputy Military Adviser. We hope that those responsible for these killings will be brought to justice soon.

As a result of the killings of the UNSMA personnel, the United Nations suspended its activities in Afghanistan. However, following the signing of the Supplementary Protocol to the Memorandum of Understanding between the United Nations and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan on 24 October 1998, we

now hope that the United Nations will resume its humanitarian activities in Afghanistan soon.

We note with regret that there have been many retaliatory killings in Afghanistan this year. In this context, we are deeply concerned that despite the explicit call by the General Assembly last year in its resolution 52/211, the United Nations has not completed its investigations into the killings of prisoners of war in and around Mazar-e-Sharif in 1997. Such inaction tarnishes the image of the United Nations as a neutral and impartial mediator.

We welcome the announcement by Kabul authorities in October this year that they would ban the production, transfer and sale of landmines. On the other hand, we deeply deplore the continued laying of mines by the northern alliance, as disclosed in the Secretary-General's report, resulting in casualties among innocent women and children. We are also concerned over the slow progress in mine clearance being carried out under the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan (UNOCHA) Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan. We regret that only 23 square kilometres of mined areas have been cleared so far this year. In this context, I would like to recall our statement of last year in which we pointed out that, at the current rate, it would take another decade to rid the remaining 140 square kilometres of the high-priority mined areas, to say nothing of the real objective of demining the whole country. Into the bargain, another 30,000 Afghans would be killed by the millions of mines left behind by the Soviet forces and those planted in recent years. We again urge further concerted efforts and generous donations for mine-clearing programmes of the United Nations and the non-governmental organizations. Those who laid these mines and then walked away should be asked to provide maps of the mine fields, to facilitate mine-clearing efforts, to share the burden of the demining and, above all, to pay reparations to the families of the mine victims.

Among the positive developments this year has been the lifting of the blockade of the Hazarajat in central Afghanistan. We note with appreciation that, after the resumption of the supply of humanitarian assistance to Bamyan and other regions, the Afghans living in the central parts of Afghanistan will be able to sustain themselves during the winter season.

It is a matter of great disappointment to us that, as of last month, a mere $51 million, or less than one third of the $157 million required, have been pledged for projects in the 1998 Consolidated Appeal for Assistance to Afghanistan. This shows a lack of commitment on the part of the international community to address the plight of the common Afghan, who has continued to suffer since the invasion of his country by the Soviet Union in 1979 and then through the subsequent fratricidal civil war.

We are also concerned over the interlinkages being established between the progress on the gender issue and the supply of humanitarian assistance to the needy in Afghanistan. We all know that food reaches women and children through heads of families, who are mostly men in the traditional Afghan society. These conditionalities, therefore, can aggravate further the plight of hapless women and children of Afghanistan.

The people of Afghanistan are in need of substantial humanitarian supplies to sustain their livelihood. The Afghan economy has been completely destroyed by 10 years of struggle against the Soviet military intervention and the subsequent civil war. There is no hope of its revival without massive international assistance. For the moment, the Afghan people depend heavily on Pakistan for food and other essential items, which enable them to survive at subsistence level. Regardless of political considerations, the Member States must face up to this grave humanitarian challenge and provide, on a priority basis, all possible financial, technical and material assistance for the rebuilding and reconstruction of the war-ravaged country.

Pakistan welcomes the agreement between the Kabul authorities and the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention on the eradication of poppy cultivation. However, the Secretary-General's report shows that much needs to be done to rid the country of this menace. It is important for the success of this programme that the United Nations provide adequate resources to the Afghan authorities for their crop substitution programme. Unless this is done, it would be naive to think that poppy cultivation in Afghanistan can be brought under control in an effective manner.

The Afghan people have also suffered due to the devastating earthquakes in February and May this year. Pakistan was among the first countries to airlift relief supplies for the people of the affected areas. We note with satisfaction that, as part of the reconstruction effort, the United Nations is providing support for rebuilding some 15,000 homes.

The refugee situation remained largely unchanged this year. Pakistan continues to host about 1.5 million refugees. We are providing, and will continue to provide, succour to these refugees from our own meagre resources, as foreign assistance has largely dried up due to donor fatigue. This year only 86,000 Afghans voluntarily returned to their country from Pakistan, while about 1,600 returned from Iran. We note with regret and disappointment that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees's (UNHCR) repatriation programme has been badly undermined by the unprecedented funding crisis, which has led to the suspension of all organized group repatriation for the remainder of 1998. We therefore urge the international community to contribute generously for the repatriation and rehabilitation of the Afghan refugees, as this would demonstrate the dividends of peace to them.

A number of earnest efforts have been made this year to find a political settlement to the Afghan crisis. With the objective of jump-starting an intra-Afghan dialogue, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif convened a meeting of the Steering Committee of the Afghan parties in Islamabad from 26 April to 3 May 1998. However, differences between the two sides on a minor issue led to the breakdown of the talks.

We would like to place on record our deep appreciation to the Secretary-General, his Special Envoy and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) for their concerted efforts for the restoration of peace in Afghanistan.

The Secretary-General convened seven meetings of the "six plus two" group and two meetings of the Group of 21, with the purpose of examining the developments in Afghanistan and of finding a lasting solution to the Afghan crisis. The ministerial- level meeting of the six plus two group on 21 September 1998 was particularly important, as it helped defuse a dangerous situation having implications for regional as well as international peace and security. We welcome the proposed meeting of the "six plus two" group in Tashkent. We are confident that the meeting will contribute to our collective goal of restoring peace in Afghanistan.

Special Envoy Ambassador Brahimi undertook two visits to Afghanistan and the region this year. His visit from 29 September to 25 October 1998 was particularly important since he was able to defuse the tension along the Afghanistan-Iran border. His decision to visit Kandahar was a bold one. It enabled him to take up directly with the supreme leader of the Taliban, Mullah Omar, the demands of the "six plus two" group contained in the points of common understanding agreed on 21 September 1998. It facilitated the release of all Iranian prisoners and the return of the dead bodies of the personnel of the Iranian Consulate- General killed in Mazar-e-Sharif. Mullah Omar expressed his regrets over the death of the Iranians and conveyed his grief to the bereaved families. He indicated the readiness of the Taliban authorities to cooperate with an international investigation into the reported mass killings and discovery of mass graves of Taliban fighters in Mazar-e-Sharif in 1997, as well as the recent claims and reports of mass killings. Mullah Omar also agreed that Iran and the Kabul authorities should meet at a mutually agreeable time and place, such as the OIC headquarters at Jeddah or the United Nations offices in Geneva, Vienna or New York, to iron out their differences. Pakistan welcomes these positive results of Ambassador Brahimi's visit. We are confident that he will build on these achievements in the future.

The Kabul authorities have expressed their readiness to broaden the ethnic dispensation of their Government. They were, however, of the view that the defeated and discredited warlords should not be allowed any role in the political process of the country, as these warlords were responsible for Afghanistan's continuing tragedy.

Pakistan supports the Secretary-General's intention, with the consent of the Taliban and other relevant Afghan parties, to add a new monitoring function to UNSMA, with the primary objective of promoting respect for minimum humanitarian standards and deterring the recurrence of massive and systematic violations of human rights in the future.

Despite some positive developments this year, much needs to be done to steer the country out of the devastation of a protracted conflict and to put it on the track of reconciliation, progress and prosperity. The people of Afghanistan deserve peace after seeing the plundering of their country as a result of prolonged Soviet occupation and the subsequent internal power struggle among the Afghan factions.

We believe that there is a window of opportunity now for the restoration of peace in Afghanistan. However, this would be possible only if there were a cessation of all outside interference in Afghanistan. The recent impounding by the Kyrgyz authorities of a trainload of weapons destined for Ahmed Shah Masood, 700 tons according to some sources, shows that massive arms supplies continue to be smuggled into Afghanistan.

The neighbours of Afghanistan should also work for the restoration of peace and harmony in Afghanistan instead of raising alarms over an imaginary threat. We are encouraged by the pronouncements made by the Kabul authorities that their agenda was purely domestic and that it posed no threat to any neighbouring country. The aim of our efforts should be to establish a relationship of trust and confidence with them and to avoid seeking pretexts for interfering in the internal affairs of Afghanistan.

Pakistan's consistent policy has been the promotion of a peaceful and negotiated settlement in Afghanistan. In order to achieve this objective, Pakistan has continued constructive engagement with all parties to the conflict. No country has suffered more than Pakistan over the last 19 years due to the conflict in Afghanistan, other than Afghanistan itself. We are still looking after 1.5 million Afghan refugees almost single-handedly. Pakistan has also suffered from the spillover of drug-trafficking, illicit arms-smuggling and terrorism as a result of conditions inside Afghanistan.

Before concluding, let me briefly turn to the draft resolution on Afghanistan before the General Assembly today. It is unfortunate that the draft resolution paints a pessimistic picture of the situation in Afghanistan, despite the fact that there is peace today in nearly 90 per cent of that country. The overall tone and tenor of the draft resolution is biased against one party to the conflict.

The most conspicuous omission in this context is the absence of any reference to the ongoing shelling of Kabul by the forces of Ahmed Shah Masood, despite the fact that this has been mentioned in the Secretary-General's report. Such omissions do not serve well the image of the United Nations as an impartial mediator.

The draft resolution is replete with the phrase "in particular the Taliban". This makes it lopsided and biased, giving the impression that the violence and the social evils in Afghanistan are due only to the Taliban.

The draft resolution mentions ethnic and religious persecution, particularly against the Shiites. This is not substantiated by realities on the ground. We have not come across any recent confirmed reports about sectarian persecution. On the contrary, Ustad Akbari, one of the most important Shiite leaders, along with others from Hizb-e-Wahdat, have joined the Taliban, as has the Uzbek commander Nasim Mahdhi. They are at present talking to the Taliban, and there are good prospects for their being offered key positions in the Government.

The reference to the convening of a *Loya Jirgah* betrays an ignorance of Afghan traditions. A *Loya Jirgah* can be convened only by the Afghans. The requirement is that it be held inside Afghan territory in times of national emergency. This means that there has to be consensus. A *Loya Jirgah* cannot be convened by a handful of Afghan parties and personalities. It is a purely Afghan affair, without any advice or promotion by outside parties or entities.

The Taliban have admitted that the killing of the Iranian personnel in Mazar-e-Sharif was carried out by renegade elements of their militia. The formulation in operative paragraph 12 gives the impression that the unfortunate incident was the outcome of a deliberate Taliban policy decision.

The Taliban authorities have officially imposed a ban on the promotion, transport and sale of landmines. In contrast, landmines are being laid by the northern alliance, as reflected in Secretary-General's report. There is no reference to this in the draft resolution.

Due to these serious shortcomings, we dissociate ourselves from the consideration of the draft resolution

before the General Assembly today. We cannot be a party to a draft resolution that attempts to isolate and alienate one party while ignoring the atrocities committed by the other, that overlooks the nascent but significant positive trends towards stability emerging in a situation of extreme and prolonged tragedy and that lacks emphasis on addressing the acute humanitarian needs of the Afghan population.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): While I greatly appreciate the requests by many delegations that draft resolution A/53/L.66 be adopted today, I should like to inform members of the Assembly that in order to allow time for the review of the programme budget implications, action on the draft resolution will be taken at a later date, to be announced.

Programme of work

Postponement of date of recess

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I should like to draw the attention of members to a matter relating to the date of recess of the current session.

Members will recall that at its 3rd plenary meeting, on 15 September 1998, the General Assembly decided that the fifty-third session should recess on 11 December 1998.

However, as the Fifth Committee will continue its work until next week, the Assembly will therefore not be able to conclude its work on Friday, 11 December 1998. I should like, therefore, to propose to the Assembly that it postpone its date of recess until Thursday, 17 December 1998.

If I hear no objection, may I take it that the Assembly agrees to this proposal?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.